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ABSTRACT

Prepared by the Alabama Intellectual Freedom Committee, this practical handbook explores the concerns of librarians, especially school librarians, in the area of intellectual freedom. Included is the Library Bill of Rights, followed by an interpretation which suggests procedures for effective preparation for and confrontation with "censors." In addition, the ALA presents a statement of selection/acquisition policies. Appendix A contains a statement on the freedom to read and a reprint of the School Library Bill of Rights. Further interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights discuss restricted access to library materials, sexism, racism, labeling, and confidentiality of library records. The report concludes with two recommended forms: a librarian's report to the intellectual freedom committee, and a citizen's request for reconsideration of library material. (SW)

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Manual
On
Intellectual Freedom

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Intellectual Freedom Committee

Alabama Library Association

1979

IR007944

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M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: February 26, 1979

FROM: Betty Beal, President Alabama Library Association
Alabama Intellectual Freedom Committee

TO: Alabama Library Association Members

RE: Intellectual Freedom Manual

The Alabama Library Association in conjunction with the Alabama Intellectual Freedom Committee is proud to present to its membership a complimentary copy of the Intellectual Freedom Manual. Please read and study the Manual carefully.

It is hoped that publication and distribution of this Manual will will educate librarians regarding censorship. The Manual discusses; necessary prevention techniques, how to handle censorship attempts, and hopefully, how to defuse them before they become major problems. If problems do arise the Manual provides instructions for handling them. The Intellectual Freedom Manual is a useful tool for all librarians -- utilize it.

Additional copies of the Manual can be ordered, prepaid or billed for $2.00 from the following address:

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM MANUAL
Alabama Library Association
Executive Secretary
P. O. Box BY
University, Alabama 35486

Members of the 1977-78 Intellectual Freedom Committe who helped write the Intellectual Freedom Manual are:

Anne Harms, Chairperson
Sandy Akin
Joan Atkinson
Cary Frederick
Dawn Fuller
Helen Gibson
Judy Green
Patricia Harper
Ernie Laseter
Shirley Laseter
Theresa Ross
Cissy Scott
Jane Smith
Art Young

Members of the 1978-79 Intellectual Freedom Committee who helped get the Intellectual Freedom Manual adopted are:

Judy Green, Chairperson
Sandy Akin
Joan Atkinson
Dawn Fuller
Gail Graves
Anne Harms
Patricia Harper
Michael Kronenfeld
Ernie Laseter
Shirley Laseter
David Lowe
Linda Osburn
Annette Watters
Art Young
Ken Zaleski

I. INTRODUCTION

The Alabama Library Association is vitally concerned with the need and right of every citizen of the State to have free access to libraries and their collections. By taking this position, the Alabama Library Association affirms the freedoms of speech and press as guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States and the various policy statements regarding intellectual freedom issued by the American Library Association (ALA). Simply defined, intellectual freedom denotes the right of all citizens to full protection of their freedom of expression and to the corollary of that freedom, the freedom to read. Americans are justly proud of their First Amendment freedom, and safeguarding them has been a process of constant vigilance. Throughout our history, reading, writing, and speech have been subject to restrictive challenges by various individuals and groups. To preserve the democratic ideal of an informed electorate and to encourage the diffusion of divergent ideas is the responsibility of everyone. Libraries/media centers serve as the focal points for the collection and dissemination of the world's information. Libraries therefore have a special obligation to ensure representative collections and to safeguard unimpeded access to library materials.

This practical handbook has been designed to provide you with information about censorship and how to combat it. Remember above all that intellectual freedom can only be preserved by planning ahead. You must be ready for the censor to effectively combat the threat. And don't presume that the censor will always be an outsider.

The history of librarianship is replete with examples of librarians who have imposed personal biases on materials selection and access to information. Librarians should uphold the same standards of intellectual freedom as those applied to their patrons.

II. ALABAMA INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM COMMITTEE

The Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC) of the Alabama Library Association is a membership committee comprised of librarians from all types of libraries and major geographic regions of the State. The IFC has two major responsibilities: 1) to develop intellectual freedom continuing education programs for librarians and their staff; 2) To act as a referral and adjudicative agency for problems relating to censorship in Alabama libraries. The Alabama IFC cooperates with the IFC of ALA, and will refer problems to the national committee when circumstances warrant. Liaison, as appropriate, is also maintained with other state and national organizations which support the principles of intellectual freedom.

The present mandate of the Alabama Library Association IFC was adopted by the Association's Council in 1977:

- To encourage discussion and debate among librarians concerning selection and censorship of materials
- To keep librarians in the State of Alabama informed on matters of national significance in support of intellectual freedom.
- To maintain an effective communication channel with the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom.
- To encourage support of the Library Bill of Rights of the American Library Association and all other programs relating to the free access of information.
- To explore ways of stimulating self-awareness of personal opinions and prejudices which may interfere with objective selection practices.
- To investigate actual or alleged library censorship cases in the State of Alabama in a constructive manner and recommend to the Association an appropriate response when action is considered necessary.

III. PREPARING FOR THE CENSOR

A. Principal Documents

The cornerstone document of ALA's intellectual freedom program is the Library Bill of Rights. An interpretative commentary on the meaning of that document was issued in 1962, and contains succinct advice on how to cope with a censorship attack. Both statements deserve careful reading and are reprinted below.

LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

The Council of the American Library Association reaffirms its belief in the following basic policies which should govern the services of all libraries.

1. As a responsibility of library service, books and other library materials selected should be chosen for values of interest, information and enlightenment of all the people of the community. In no case should library materials be excluded because of the race or nationality or the social, political, or religious views of the authors.

2. Libraries should provide books and other materials presenting all points of view concerning the problems and issues of our times; no library materials should be proscribed or removed from libraries because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

3. Censorship should be challenged by libraries in the maintenance of their responsibility to provide public information and enlightenment.

4. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.

5. The rights of an individual to the use of a library should not be denied or abridged because of his age, race, religion, national origin or social or political views.

6. As an institution of education for democratic living, the library should welcome the use of its meeting rooms for socially useful and cultural activities and discussion of current public questions. Such meeting places should be available on equal terms to all groups in the community regardless of the beliefs and affiliations of their members, provided that the meetings be open to the public.

Adopted June 18, 1948
Amended February 2, 1961, and June 27, 1967,
by the ALA Council

AN INTERPRETATION
OF
THE LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

Libraries of all sizes and types continue to be targets of pressures from groups and individuals who wish to use the library as an instrument of their own tastes and views. The problem differs somewhat between the public library, with a responsibility to present as wide a spectrum of materials as its budget can afford, and the school or academic library who collection is designed to support the educational objectives of the institution. Both, however, involve the freedom of the library to meet its professional responsibilities for the whole community.

To combat censorship efforts from groups and individuals, every library should take certain measures to clarify policies and to establish community relations. While these steps should be taken regardless of any attack of prospect of attack, they will provide a firm and clearly defined position if selection policies are challenged. As normal operating procedure, each library should:

To combat censorship efforts from groups and individuals, every library should take certain measures to clarify policies and to establish community relations. While these steps should be taken regardless of any attack of prospect of attack, they will provide a firm and clearly defined position if selection policies are challenged. As normal operating procedure, each library should:

1. Maintain a definite materials selection policy.

   It should be in written form and approved by the appropriate governing authority. It should apply to all library materials equally.
2. Maintain a clearly defined method for handling complaints.

   The complaint be filed in writing and the complainant be properly identified before his request is considered. Action should be deferred until full consideration by the appropriate administrative authority.
3. Maintain lines of communication with civic, religious, educational and political bodies of the community.

   Participation in local civic organizations and in community affairs is desirable. Because the library and the school are key centers of the community, the librarian should be known publicly as a community leader.

4. Maintain a vigorous public relations program on behalf of intellectual freedom.

   Newspapers, radio and television should be informed of policies governing materials selection and use, and of any special activities pertaining to intellectual freedom.

Adherence to the practices listed above will not preclude confrontations with pressure groups or individuals but may provide a base from which to counter efforts to place restraints on the library. If a confrontation does occur, librarians should remember the following:

1. Remain calm. Don't confuse noise with substance. Require the deliberate handling of the complaint under previously established rules. Treat the group or individual who complains with dignity, courtesy and good humor. Given the facts, most citizens will support the responsible exercise of professional freedom by teachers and librarians, and will insist on protecting their own freedom to read.

2. Take immediate steps to assure that the full facts surrounding a complaint are known to the administration and the governing authority. The school librarian should go through the principal to the superintendent and the school board; the public librarian, to the board of trustees or to the appropriate governing authority of the community; the college or university librarian, to the president and through him to the board of trustees. Present full, written information giving the nature of the complaint and identifying the source.

3. Seek the support of the local press when appropriate. The freedom to read and freedom of the press go hand in hand.

4. Inform local civic organizations of the facts and enlist their support when appropriate. Meet negative pressure with positive pressure.

5. In most cases, defend the principal of the freedom to read and the professional responsibility of teachers and librarians. Only rarely is it necessary to defend the individual item. Laws governing obscenity, subversive material and other questionable matter are subject to interpretation by courts. Responsibility for removal of any library materials from public access rests with this established process.

6. Inform the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom and other appropriate national and state organizations concerned with intellectual freedom of the nature of the problem. Even though censorship must be fought at the local level, there

is value in the support and assistance of agencies outside the area which have no personal involvement. They can often cite parallel cases and suggest methods of meeting an attack.

The Principles and procedures discussed above apply to all kinds of censorship attacks and are supported by groups such as the National Education Association, the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Council of Teachers of English, as well as the American Library Association. While the practices provide positive means for preparing for and meeting pressure group complaints, they serve the more general purpose of supporting the Library Bill of Rights, particularly Article III which states that: "Censorship should be challenged by libraries in the maintenance of their responsibility to provide public information and enlightenment." Adherence to this principle is especially necessary when under pressure.

Adopted February 1, 1962; revised January 28, 1972 by the ALA Council

Additional policy statements issued by ALA on such matters as book labeling and the confidentiality of library records are reproduced in Appendix A.

B. Selection/Acquisition Policies

Development of a selection policy is not only sound professional practice; the availability of a concise selection document will avert many censorship problems. It is desirable to differentiate a selection policy from an acquisitions policy. The selection policy is a broad, philosophical statement which is several pages identifies the library/media center's collection interests. Selection policy statements should refer explicitly to pertainent ALA intellectual freedom documents. It is the selection policy statement which should normally be furnished to the library patron upon request. An acquisitions policy is a detailed elaboration of selection criteria and other factors pertainent to local collection development. Selection and acquisition policies should be coordinated with appropriate library staff and applicable governing boards. Periodic review of selection documents is necessary in order to accommodate changing collection needs and to incorporate current references to intellectual freedom policies.

IV. WHEN THE CENSOR ARRIVES

A. General

The Alabama Library Association is charged with the responsibility of investigating alleged violations of the freedom to read. In fulfilling this objective, the IFC may intervene independently or at the request of either party involved in a dispute. It is not our goal to generate an adversary relationship. The IFC will attempt to settle complaints through persuasion and to avoid publicity whenever possible. If, after a thorough investigation, a case cannot be satisfactorily resolved, the IFC will forward a recommendation to the Executive Council of the Alabama Library Association for appropriate action. Such recommendations may include litigation and/or publicity regarding unacceptable practices.

In the event that a problem should arise in your library/media center, be prepared to use the two forms which are located in Appendix B. Whenever possible, ask the complainant to fill out and sign the "Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of Library Material" form. Requesting a library patron to complete this form will often defuse the situation. If the problem persists, complete the "Librarian's Report to the Alabama Intellectual Freedom Committee. (Appendix B). You are encouraged to alert the Committee by telephone even before you have completed the request for IFC action form.

"Librarian's Report to the Alabama Intellectual Freedom Committee." (Appendix B). You are encouraged to alert the Committee by telephone even before you have completed the request for IFC action form.

B. Alabama IFC Procedures

1. The Committee shall secure a signed request for investigation form.

2. Committee members will be alerted and furnished with a copy of the complaint form within three (3) days of receipt.

3. If a majority of the committee concur (meeting or telephone notification), the chairman will appoint a Field Team which shall investigate the case and report within thirty (30) days.

4. Upon receipt of the Field Team report, the chairman will convene the Committee within seven (7) days.

5. If indicated, a report with recommendations will be

forwarded to the Executive Board of the Alabama Library Association no later than five (5) days after the Committee meets to consider the Field Team report.

C. Guidelines for Field Team

1. Team members shall, as a rule, be members of the IFC. At least one-half of the Field Team shall be Committee members.

2. Teams shall normally consist of three (3) members.

3. No member of the Field Team shall be a party to the case under investigation.

4. The Team shall give advance notice of its visit by telephone and letter of confirmation.

5. The Team shall make every effort to contact and to interview all concerned parties separately in order to obtain all points of view.

6. Careful notes based on guidelines determined by the Committee shall be taken by the Team at all interviews.

7. Full Team reports shall be submitted to the Committee; summary reports as necessary to the concerned parties. Minority reports may be submitted.

8. Interview records shall be strictly confidential and may not be released outside of the Committee except on written consent of the person(s) whose interview record(s) are involved.

D. Alabama Library Association. Intellectual Freedom Committee

1. For information or assistance please contact the chairman.

2. The chairman is listed with other Association officers in each issue of The Alabama Librarian. In one issue each year a current list of committee members is published.

3. You may write to the following address:

Intellectual Freedom Committee, Chairman
Alabama Library Association
Box BY
University, Alabama 35486

APPENDIX A

Intellectual Freedom Documents

THE FREEDOM TO READ

The freedom to read is essential to our democracy. It is continuously under attack. Private groups and public authorities in various parts of the country are working to remove books from sale, to censor textbooks, to label "controversial" books, to distribute lists of "objectionable" books or authors, and to purge libraries. These actions apparently rise from a view that our national tradition of free expression is no longer valid; that censorship and suppression are needed to avoid the subversion of politics and the corruption of morals. We, as citizens devoted to the use of books and as librarians and publishers responsible for disseminating them, wish to assert the public interest in the preservation of the freedom to read.

We are deeply concerned about these attempts at suppression. Most such attempts rest on a denial of the fundamental premise of democracy; that the ordinary citizen, by exercising his critical judgment, will accept the good and reject the bad. The censors, public and private, assume that they should determine what is good and what is bad for their fellow citizens.

We trust Americans to recognize propaganda, and to reject it. We do not believe they need the help of censors to assist them in this task. We do not believe they are prepared to sacrifice their heritage of a free press in order to "protected" against what others think may be bad for them. We believe they still favor free enterprise in ideas and expression.

We are aware, of course, that books are no alone in being subjected to efforts at suppression. We are aware that these efforts are related to a larger pattern of pressures being brought against education, the press, films, radio, and television. The problem is not only one of actual censorship. The shadow of fear cast by pressures leads, we suspect, to an even larger voluntary curtailment of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy.

Such pressure toward conformity is perhaps natural to a time of uneasy change and pervading fear. Especially when so many of our apprehensions are directed against an ideology, the expression of a dissident idea becomes a thing feared in itself, and we tend to move against it as against a hostile deed, with suppression.

And yet suppression is never more dangerous than in such a time of social tension. Freedom has given the United States the elasticity to endure strain. Freedom keeps open the path of novel and creative solutions, and enables change to come by choice. Every silencing of a heresy, every enforcement of an orthodoxy, diminishes the toughness and resilience of our society and leaves is the less able to deal with stress.

Now as always in our history, books are among our greatest instrument of freedom. They are almost the only means for making generally available audience. They are essential to the extended discussion which serious thought requires, and to the accumulation of knowledge and ideas into organized collections.

We believe that free communication is essential to the preservation of a free society and a creative culture. We believe that these pressures towards conformity present the danger of limiting the range and variety of inquiry and expression on which our democracy and our culture depend. We believe that every American community must jealously guard the freedom to publish and to circulate, in order to preserve its own freedom to read. We believe that publishers and librarians have a profound responsibility to give validity to that freedom to read by making it possible for the readers to choose freely from a variety of offerings.

The freedom to read is guaranteed by the Constitution. Those with faith in free men will stand firm on these constitutional guarantees of essential rights and will exercise the responsibilities that accompany these right.

We therefore affirm these propositions:

1. It is in the public interest for publishers and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions, including those which are unorthodox and unpopular with the majority.

   Creative thought is by definition new, and what is new is different. The bearer of every new thought is a rebel until his idea is refined and tested. Totalitarian systems attempt to maintain themselves in power by the ruthless suppression of any concept which challenges the established orthodoxy. The power of a democratic system to adapt to change is vastly strengthened by the freedom of its citizens to choose widely from among conflicting opinions offered freely to them. To stifle every nonconformist idea at birth would mark the end of the democratic process. Furthermore, only through the constant activity of weighing and selecting can the democratic mind attain the strength demanded by times like these. We need to know not only what we believe but why we believe it.

2. Publishers, librarians, and booksellers do not need to endorse every idea or presentation contained in the books they make available. It would conflict with the public interest for them to establish their own political, moral, or aesthetic views as a standard for determining what books should be published or circulated.

Publishers and librarians serve the educational process by helping to make available knowledge and ideas required for the growth of the mind and the increase of learning. They do not foster education by imposing as mentors the patterns of their own thought. The people should have the freedom to read and consider a broader range of ideas than those that may be held by any single librarian or publisher or government or church. It is wrong that what one man can read should be confined to what another thinks proper.

3. It is contrary to the public interest for publishers or librarians to determine the acceptability of a book on the basic of the personal history or political affiliations of the author.

   A book should be judged as a book. No art or literature can flourish if it is to be measured by the political views or private lives of its creators. No society of free men can flourish which draws up lists of writers to whom it will not listen, whatever they may have to say.

4. There is no place in our society for efforts to coerce the taste of others, to confine adults to the reading matter deemed suitable for adolescents, or to inhibit the efforts of writers to achieve artistic expressions.

   To some, much or modern literature is shocking. But is not much of life itself shocking? We cut off literature at the source if we prevent writers from dealing with the stuff of life. Parents and teachers have a responsibility to prepare the young to meet the diversity of experiences in life to which they will be exposed, as they have a responsibility to help them learn to think critically for themselves. These are affirmative responsibilities, not to be discharged simply by preventing them from reading works for which they are not yet prepared. In these matters taste differs, and taste cannot be legislated; nor can machinery be devised which will suit the demands of one group without limiting the freedom of others.

5. It is not in the public interest to force a reader to accept with any book the prejudgement of a label characterizing the book or author as subversive or dangerous.

   The idea of labeling presupposes the existence of individuals or groups with wisdom to determine by authority what is good or bad for the citizen. It presupposes that each individual must be directed in mak-

ing up his mind about the ideas he examines. But Americans do not need others to do their thinking for them.

6. It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people's freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large.

It is inevible in the give and take of the democratic process that the political, the moral, or the aesthetic concepts of an individual or group will occasionally collide with those of another individual or group. In a free society each individual is free to determine for himself what he wishes to read, and each group is free to determine what it will recommend to its freely associated members. But no group has the right to take the law into its own hands, and to impose its own concept of politics or morality upon other members of a democratic society. Freedom is no freedom if it is accorded only to the accepted and the inoffensive.

7. It is the responsibility of publisher and librarians to give full meaning to the freedom to read by providing books that enrich the quality and diversity of thought and expression. By the exercise of this affirmative responsibility, bookmen can demonstrate that the answer to a bad book is a good one, the answer to a bad idea is a good one.

The freedom to read is of little consequence when expended on the trivial; it is frustrated when the reader cannot obtain matter fit for his purpose. What is needed is not only the absence of restraint, but the positive provision of opportunity for the people to read the best that has been thought and said. Books are the major channel by which the intellectual inheritance is handed down, and the principal means of its testing and growth. The defense of their freedom and society, requires of all bookmen the utmost of their facilities, and deserves of all citizens the fullest of their support.

We state these propositions neither lightly nor as easy generalizations. We here stake out a loftly claim for the value of books. We do so because we believe that they are good, possessed of enormous variety and usefulness, worthy of cherishing and keeping free. We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state

these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours.

This statement was originally issued in May 1953 by the Westchester Conference of the American Library Association and the American Book Publishers Council, which in 1970 consolidated with the American Education Publishers Institute to become the Association of American Publishers. **Adopted June 25, 1952.**

Revised January 28, 1972, by the ALA Council

SCHOOL LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

The American Association of School Librarians reaffirms its belief in the Library Bill of Rights of the American Library Association. Media personnel are concerned with generating understanding of American freedoms through the development of informed and responsible citizens. To this end the American Association of School Librarians asserts that the responsibility of the school library media center is:

To provide a comprehensive collection of instructional materials selected in compliance with basic written selection principles, and to provide maximum accessibility to these materials.

To provide materials that will support the curriculum, taking into consideration the individual's needs, and the varied interests, abilities, socio-economic backgrounds, and maturity levels of the students served.

To provide materials for teachers and students that will encourage growth in knowledge, and that will develop literary, cultural and aesthetic appreciation, and ethical standards.

To provide materials which reflect the ideas and beliefs of religious, social, political, historical, and ethnic groups and their contribution to the American and world heritage and culture, thereby enabling students to develop an intellectual integrity informing judgments.

To provide a written statement, approved by the local Boards of Education, of the procedures for meeting the challenge of censorship of materials in school library media centers.

To provide qualified professional personnel to serve teachers and students.

Approved by the American Association of School Librarians Board of Directors, 1969

RESTRICTED ACCESS TO LIBRARY MATERIALS
An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

Restricting access of certain titles and certain classes of library materials is a practice common to many libraries in the United States. Collections of these materials are referred to by a variety of names such as "closed shelf," "locked case," "adults only," or "restricted shelf" collections.

Three reasons generally advanced to justify restricted access are:

1. It provides a refuge for materials that belong in the collection but which may be considered "objectionable" by some library patron;

2. It provides a means for controlling distribution of materials which allegedly should not be read by those who are not be read by those who are not "prepared" for such materials by experience, education, or age;

3. It provides a means to protect certain materials from theft and mutilation.

Though widely used-and often practical-restricted access to library materials is frequently in opposition to the principles of intellectual freedom. While the limitation differs from direct censorship activities, such as removal of library materials or refusal to purchase certain publications, it nonetheless constitutes censorship, albeit a subtle form. As a form of censorship, restricted access violates the spirit of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS in the following ways:

1. It violates the portion of Article II which states that "... no library materials should be proscribed...because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval."

   The word "proscribed," as used in Article II, means "suppressed." Restricted access achieves de facto suppression of certain materials.

   Even when a title is listed in the card catalog with a reference to its restricted shelf status, a barrier is placed between the patron and the publication. Because a majority of materials placed in restricted collections deal with controversial, un-

usual, or "sensitive" subjects, asking a librarian or circulation clerk for them is an embarrassment for patrons desiring the materials. Because restricted collections are often composed of materials which some library patrons consider "objectionable," the potential user is predisposed to thinking of the materials as "objectionable," and is accordingly inhibited from asking for them. Although the barrier between the materials and the patron is psychological, it is nonetheless a tangible limitation on his access to information.

2. It violates Article V which states that, "The rights of an individual to the use of a library should not be denied or abridged because of his age. . . ."

   Limiting access of certain materials to adults only abridges the use of the library for minors. "Use of the library," includes use of, and access to, library materials. Such restrictions are generally instituted under the assumption that certain materials are "harmful" to minors, or in an effort to avoid controversy with parents who might think so.

   The librarian who would restrict the availability of materials to minors because of actual or suspected parental objection should bear in mind that he is not in loco parent is in his position as librarian. The American Library Association holds that it is the parent-and only the parent-who may restrict his children-and only his children-in reading matter. The parent who would rather his child did not read certain materials or certain kinds of materials should so advise the child.*

When restricted access is implemented to protect materials from theft or mutilation, the use of the practice may be legitimate. However segregation of materials to protect them must be administered with extreme attention to the rationale for restricting access. Too often only "controversial" materials are the subject of such segregation, leading to the conclusion that factors other than theft and mutilation were the true consider tions. The distinction is extremely difficult to make, both for the librarian and the patron.

Selection policies, carefully developed on the basis of principles of intellectual freedom and the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS' should not be vitiated by administrative practices such as restricted access.

***See also FREE ACCESS TO LIERARIES FOR MINORS' adopted by the ALA Council, June 30, 1972**

Adopted February 2, 1973 by the ALA Council

SEXISM, RACISM AND OTHER "ISMS" IN LIBRARY MATERIALS
An Interpretation of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

Traditional aims of censorship efforts have been to suppress political, sexual or religious expressions. The same three subjects have also been the source of most complaints about materials in library collections. Another basis for complaints, however, has become more and more frequent. Due, perhaps, to increased awareness of the rights of minorities and increased efforts to secure those rights, libraries are being asked to remove, restrict or reconsider some materials which are allegedly derogatory to specific minorities or which supposedly perpetuate stereotypes and false images of minorities. Among the several recurring "isms" used to describe the contents of the materials objected to are "racism" and "sexism."

Complaints that library materials convey a derogatory or false image of a minority strike the personal social consciousness and sense of responsibility of some librarians who-accordingly-comply with the requests to remove such materials. While such efforts to counteract injustice are understandable, and perhaps even commendable as reflections of deep personal commitments to the ideal of equality for all people, they are-nonetheless-in conflict with the professional responsibility of librarians to guard against encroachments upon intellectual freedom.

This responsibility has been espoused and reaffirmed by the American Library Association in many of its basic documents on intellectual freedom over the past thirty years. The most concise statement of the Association's position appears in Article II of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS which states that "Libraries should provide books and materials presenting all points of view concerning the problems and issues of our times; no library materials should be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval."

While the application of this philosophy may seem simple when dealing with political, religious or even sexual expressions, its full implications become somewhat difficult when dealing with ideas, such as racism or sexism, which may find abhorrent, repugnant and inhumane. But, as stated in the FREEDOM TO READ STATEMENT;

> "It is inevitable in the give and take of the democratic process that the political, the moral, or the aesthetic concepts of an individual or group will occasionally collide with those of another individual or group. In a free society each individual is free to determine for himself what he wishes to read, and each group is free to determine what it will recommend to its freely associated members. But no group has the right to take the law into its own hands, and to impose its own concept of politics or morality upon other members of democratic society. Freedom is no freedom if it is accorded only to the accepted and the inoffensive . . . We realize that application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state these propositions in the comfor-

table belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours."

Some find this creed acceptable when dealing with materials for adults but cannot extend its application to materials for children. Such reluctance is generally based on the belief that children are more susceptable to being permanently influenced-even damaged by objectionable materials than are adults. The LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS, however, makes no distinction between materials and services for children and adults. Its principles of free access to all materials available apply to every person, as stated in Article V, "The rights of an individual to the use of a library should not be denied or abridged because of his age, race, religion, national origins or social or political views."

Some librarians deal with the problem of objectionable materials by labeling them or listing them as "racist" or "sexist." This kind of action, too has long been opposed by the American Library Association in its STATEMENT OF LABELING, which says,

> "If materials are labeled to pacify one group, there is no excuse for refusing to label any item in the library's collection. Because authoritarians tend to suppress ideas and attempt to coerce individuals to conform to a specific ideology, the American Library Association opposes such efforts which aim at closing any path to knowledge.

Others deal with the problem of objectionable materials by instituting restrictive circulation or relegating materials to closed or restricted collections. This practice, too, is in violation of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS as explained in the "Restricted Access to Library Materials" which says,

> "Too often only 'controversial' materials are the subject of such segregation, leading to the conclusion that factors other than theft and mutilation were the true considerations. The distinction is extremely difficult to make, both for the librarian and the patron. Unrestrictive selection policies, developed with care for the principles of intellectual freedom and the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS, should not be vitiated by administrative practices such as restricted circulation."

The American Library Association has made clear its position concerning the removal of library materials because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval or because of pressure from interest groups, in yet another policy statement, the RESOLUTION OF CHALLENGED MATERIALS:

> "The American Library Association declares as a matter of firm principle that no challenged material should be removed from any library under any legal or extra-legal pressure, save

after an independent determination by a judicial officer in a court of competent jurisdiction and only after an adversary hearing, in accordance with well-established principles of law."

Intellectual freedom, in its purest sense, promotes no causes, furthers no movements, and favors no viewpoints. It only provides for free access to all ideas through which any and all sides of cause and movements may be expressed, discussed and argued. The librarians cannot let his own preferences limit his degree of tolerance, for freedom is indivisible. Toleration is meaningless without toleration for the detestable.

Adopted by the Intellectual Freedom Committee, June 25, 1972

STATEMENT OF LABELING

An Interpretation of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

Because labeling violates the spirit of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS, the American Library Association opposes the technique of labeling as a means of predisposing readers against library materials for the following reasons:

1. Labeling is an attempt to prejudice the reader; and as such it is a censor's tool.

2. Although some find it easy and even proper, according to their ethics, to establish criteria for judging publications as objectionable, injustice and ignorance rather than justice and enlightenment result from such practices, and the American Library Association must oppose the establishment of such criteria.

3. Libraries do not advocate the ideas found in their collections. The presence of a magazine or book in a library does not indicate an endorsement of its contents by the library.

4. No one person should take the responsibility of labeling publications. No sizable group of persons would be likely to agree either on the types of material which should be labeled or the sources of information which should be regarded with suspicion. As a practical consideration, a librarian who labels a book or magazine might be used for libel.

5. If materials are labeled to pacify one group, there is no excuse for refusing to label any item in the library's collection. Because authoritarians tend to suppress ideas and attempt to coerce individuals to conform to a specific

ideology, the American Library Association opposes such efforts which aim at closing any path of knowledge.

Adopted July 13, 1951
Amended June 25, 1971, by the ALA Council

1 "Labeling," as it is referred to in the STATEMENT OF LABELING, is the practice of describing of designating certain library materials, by affixing a prejudicial label to them or segregating them by a prejudicial system, so as to prejudicial system, so as to predispose readers against the materials.

POLICY ON CONFIDENTIALITY OF LIBRARY RECORDS

The Council of the American Library Association strongly recommends that the responsible officers of each library in the United States:

1. Formally adopt a policy which specifically recognizes its circulation records and other records identifying the names users to be confidential in nature.

2. Advise all librarians and library employees that such records shall not be made available to any agency of state, federal, or local government except pursuant to such process, order, or subpoena as may be authorized under the authority of, and pursuant to, federal, state, or local law relating to civil, criminal, or administrative discovery procedures or legislative investigative power.

3. Resist the issuance or enforcement of any such process, order, or subpoena until such time as a proper showing of good cause has been made in a court of competent jurisdiction.*

*Note: Point 3, above, means that upon receipt of such process, order, or subpoena, the library's officers will consult with their legal counsel to determine if such process, order, or subpoena is in proper form and if there is a showing of good cause for its issuance, if the process, order, or subpoena is not in proper form or it good cause has not been shown, they will insist that such defects be cured.

Adopted January 20, 1971; revised July 4, 1975, by the ALA Council

APPENDIX B

Intellectual Freedom Forms

ALABAMA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM COMMITTEE

LIBRARIAN'S REPORT TO THE INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM COMMITTEE

DATE _____ CITY _____

NAME OF LIBRARY _____

NAME OF LIBRARIAN _____

NAME OF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER AND TITLE _____

_____

NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS MAKING COMPLAINT OR BRINGING PRESSURE _____

_____

_____

WHAT ACTION WAS TAKEN TO RESIST PRESSURE?

1. WHAT IS THE POSITION OF THE LIBRARY'S GOVERNING OFFICIAL OR BOARD? _____
2. DOES THE LIBRARY HAVE A WRITTEN MATERIALS SELECTION POLICY? _____

WHAT PUBLICITY HAS RESULTED FROM THIS? (ENCLOSE NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS)

_____

HAVE ANY INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS OTHER THAN THOSE NAMED ABOVE BECOME INVOLVED? _____

HAS ASSISTANCE BEEN REQUIRED FROM ANY OTHER INDIVIDUAL, GROUP OR AGENCY?

IF SO, HOW WAS IT DONE AND WHAT WERE THE RESULTS? _____

_____

PLEASE SUBMIT COPIES OF ALL STATEMENTS, DOCUMENTS, POLICIES, CORRESPONDENCE, ETC., WHICH ARE PERTINENT.

CITIZEN'S REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION OF LIBRARY MATERIAL

(Sample Form)

Date Submitted _____

Author _____ Hardcover ___ Paperback ___

Title _____

Publisher (if known) _____

Request initiated by _____

Address _____ Telephone #

City _____ Zip Code _____

Complaint represents: Self _____
Organization (name) _____
Other (name) _____

1. Work included in adult _____ or children _____ collection.
2. Have you read the entire book? * _____ if not, what parts have you read?
   _____
3. What do you believe is the theme of this book? _____
4. a) Are you aware of the judgment of this book by literary critics or scholars? _____
   b) Have you read the reviews? _____
5. To what in the book do you object? (Be specific-cite pages) _____
   _____
6. What do you feel might be the result of reading this book? _____
   _____
7. Is there anything good about this book? _____
8. For whom would you recommend this book? _____
9. In its place, what book of equal literary quality and subject matter would you recommend? _____
   _____
10. What would you like your library to do about this book? _____
    a) Do not loan it to my child _____
    b) Withdraw it from all children and/or adults _____
    c) Reevaluate its worth _____
11. For further comment, use space below. _____
    _____

Signature _____

* "Book" is used in the generic sense and embraces all forms of library media.